The Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme strives to remind the world of the lessons to be learned from the Holocaust so as to help prevent future acts of genocide.

Since its establishment in 2005 with United Nations General Assembly Resolution 60/7, the Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme has developed an international network of partners and a multifaceted programme that includes online and print educational products, DVDs, study guides for students, seminars, professional development programmes for teachers, a film series and a permanent exhibit at United Nations Headquarters in New York. The Programme's work culminates each year with the worldwide observance of the International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust on 27 January.

The Holocaust Programme works closely with Holocaust survivors to ensure their stories are heard and heeded as a warning against the consequences of antisemitism and other forms of discrimination.

In all of its activities, particularly with students and educators around the globe, the Programme draws crucial links between the underlying causes of genocide, the lessons to be learned from the Holocaust and the promotion of human rights today. The global network of United Nations information centres have helped to ensure that the Programme has made a global impact.

“For the past decade, the Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme has mobilized students and educators around the world to help us achieve these goals. We are grateful to our many partners — including Holocaust survivors — who have contributed to this work, which spanned 42 countries in the past year alone.”

SECRETARY-GENERAL BAN KI-MOON
Pre-War Europe

In 1919 the League of Nations was founded after the First World War.

Despite the antisemitism prevalent throughout Europe before Hitler’s rise to power in Germany in 1933, Jews actively participated in social, political and economic life. Jewish artists, writers, jurists and scientists made important contributions in pre-war Germany. As soon as the Nazis gained power, life for German Jews changed. The Nazis were driven by a racist ideology that determined that the German “race” was superior. They considered the Jews to be an inferior race that had to be eliminated.
Kristallnacht: A Turning Point in History

The passage of the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, which defined Jews based on race, provided the legal underpinning for ongoing discrimination.

Disabled persons, whose lives were seen as not worth living, were also targeted for forced sterilization and later mass murder. Anyone who opposed the Nazi regime risked arrest and incarceration for an indefinite period without due process. Many Jews responded by leaving Germany. In the months following 9 November 1938 (Kristallnacht), when widespread violence against the Jewish community resulting in arrests, killings and damage and destruction to Jewish synagogues, homes and businesses was organized by the Nazi Party, tens of thousands of German and Austrian Jews emigrated. Tens of thousands more could not leave because they were stripped of their property and because immigration to most countries in the world was severely restricted.
As more countries came under the control of Nazi Germany, Jews in German-occupied Eastern Europe were confined to extremely crowded urban ghettos and issued scant food rations, resulting in starvation and disease. German occupation authorities established local Jewish councils to administer the ghettos. Jewish council officials often did their best to help the ghetto inhabitants, but later, under duress, some assisted with deportations. Although armed resistance against the German occupation authorities and their collaborators meant almost certain death, many Jews risked their lives to fight back. In many ghettos and camps, Jewish residents or prisoners rose against the Germans despite overwhelming odds against them. Resistance also took many other forms, from flight and hiding, to attempts to retain human dignity in inhumane circumstances.
The Final Solution

Nazi Germany began its policy of systematic physical annihilation of the Jews with the invasion of the former Soviet Union in 1941.

In the occupied former Soviet Union, the Germans and their collaborators generally massacred the Jewish population and other targeted victims in shooting operations. In January 1942, Nazi officials met in Berlin at the Wannsee Conference to coordinate the “Final Solution”, the systematic annihilation of all European Jews. Already in December 1941, at Chelmno in German-occupied Poland, the SS had begun to use poison gas, a method that industrialized mass murder and killed large numbers of people more efficiently. In the spring of 1942, the SS and German police units began liquidating the ghettos of Eastern Europe. They deported Jews from many countries of Europe to Chelmno and other extermination camps in German-occupied Poland such as Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, Majdanek and Auschwitz.

*SS: This elitist paramilitary organization within the Nazi party tasked with implementing the security and population policies of the Third Reich, and in particular the mass systematic murder of Jews, known as the Final Solution. Its main modes of operation were repression, terror and murder.*
Deportation and Rescue

By late summer 1944, the Germans and their collaborators had transported nearly 3 million Jews to extermination camps, and had killed at least 2.5 million more in shooting operations and by other means.

When Jews arrived by train to the “ramp” at Auschwitz-Birkenau**, camp officials selected those who would be condemned to forced labour and those who would be sent immediately to their deaths in the gas chambers. Most Jews did not know of their fate until they reached the camps, despite rumours and periodic news reports.

While mass murder and genocide against the Jewish people were underway, some people hid Jews and their children or helped them to escape. On the territory of Germany’s Axis partners some diplomats, representing neutral nations, issued visas to Jews seeking to evade deportation. Among them was Raoul Wallenberg (Sweden), who is credited with saving thousands of Jews by issuing Swedish protective documents in Budapest in July 1944. Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority in Jerusalem, has recognized more than 25,000 non-Jews as “Righteous Among the Nations” for their courageous efforts to rescue Jews.

**Auschwitz-Birkenau: German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp (1940-1945). The World Heritage Committee agreed to change the name of the camp on UNESCO’s World Heritage List in June 2007.
The Impact on European Jewry

Approximately six million Jews, including more than one million children, were cruelly murdered or died as a result of unbearable conditions in the ghettos and camps.

Throughout Europe, Jews were deported to concentration and extermination camps located mostly in Central and Eastern Europe. European and North African Jews were also incarcerated under brutal conditions in camps in Europe and North Africa. Common to all camps was the lack of food, water, sanitation and medical care.
Countless Victims

In addition to Jews, the SS authorities incarcerated criminals, homosexuals, Jehovah’s witnesses, members of national resistance movements, Poles, political dissidents, Roma and Sinti and Soviet POWs in the camps.

The Roma and Sinti were also targeted for extermination and suffered losses estimated up to 500,000. German authorities, many of them physicians and healthcare professionals, also murdered approximately 200,000 persons with disabilities living in institutions in Germany, and tens of thousands more in institutions located in occupied Poland and occupied former Soviet Union. Millions of non-Jewish Poles, Soviet POWs and other Europeans were killed by SS authorities by direct means such as shooting, hanging, and gassing, or indirectly, from brutal treatment and criminal neglect of the basic necessities: food, shelter and medical care sufficient for survival. The SS officials attempted to cover up their deeds by hiding or destroying evidence. Upon liberation of the camps in 1945, the Allied forces documented some of these shocking crimes through confiscated documents, photographs and film.
Recovery from the War

The United Nations was founded in 1945 following the devastation of the Holocaust and the Second World War.

Its Charter aims to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war” and to “reaffirm faith and dignity in fundamental human rights”. The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), created by 44 nations in 1943 to help the victims of the war recover, preceded the establishment of the United Nations. On 1 February 1946, the newly formed United Nations General Assembly established a Committee to encourage Member States which were not signatories to join the UNRRA agreement and to make contributions to this humanitarian effort (Resolution 6 (I)). UNRRA distributed relief supplies, such as food, clothing, fuel and medicines, and provided shelter, medical care and vocational training to refugees and survivors. It also helped to repatriate millions of displaced persons.

On 14 December 1946, the United Nations General Assembly passed resolution 58 (I), which transferred the advisory social welfare functions of UNRRA to the United Nations. During its resumed first session, the General Assembly assigned these responsibilities to the newly established United Nations entities, chiefly the United Nations Children’s Fund (resolution 57 (I) 11 December 1946), the World Health Organization (resolution 61 (I) 14 December 1946) and the International Refugee Organization (resolution 62 (I) 15 December 1946).
United Nations and Genocide Prevention

After the war, the United Nations took an important step to help prevent genocide in adopting the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

Adama Dieng, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, addresses the media during a press conference in Geneva, Switzerland, March 2014.

PHOTO CREDIT: UN Photo / Jean-Marc Ferre

After the war, the United Nations took an important step to help prevent genocide in adopting the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide by General Assembly resolution 260 (III) A on 9 December 1948. This document bans acts committed with the intent to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group and declares genocide a crime under international law. At its fifty-second session in 1997, the United Nations General Assembly decided to convene the United Nations Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Establishment of an International Criminal Court, subsequently held from 15 June to 17 July 1998 in Rome. The Rome Statute creating the International Criminal Court (ICC) entered into force on 1 July 2002. The ICC, as the centerpiece of a system of international justice, is the only permanent court to try persons responsible for the crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Further action was taken to help prevent genocide when the United Nations Secretary-General appointed a Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide in 2004 and a Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect in 2008. They have distinct but complementary mandates and work together to advance national and international efforts to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, as well as their incitement.
United Nations Holocaust Remembrance and Education

The horrible crimes committed by the German Nazis and their collaborators are not to be forgotten.

On 24 January 2005, the United Nations General Assembly marked the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi death camps with a Special Session. Then on 1 November 2005, the General Assembly passed an historic resolution on Holocaust Remembrance (60/7), which established an annual International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust and called for an outreach programme on the Holocaust and the United Nations to warn against the dangers of hatred, bigotry, prejudice and racism in order to help prevent genocide. The theme of the Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme is “Remembrance and Beyond”, which highlights the two main elements of the Programme: honouring the memory of the victims and helping to prevent future acts of genocide. The Programme helps to ensure that the history of the Holocaust and its lessons are passed on to future generations. A second resolution (61/255) condemning Holocaust denial was adopted by the General Assembly on 26 January 2007. The Programme marked its tenth anniversary in 2015.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon visits the Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland, where over a million Jews and members of other minorities perished during the Second World War.
PHOTO CREDIT: UN Photo / Evan Schneider
Timeline of Events

30 January 1933  Hitler appointed Chancellor of Germany
19 August 1934  A nationwide vote held in Germany to affirm Hitler's new position as an absolute leader (Führer)
15 September 1935  Nuremberg Race Laws enacted in Germany, depriving Jews of civil rights
July 1936  The establishment of the first “Gypsy camp” (Zigeunerlager) at Marzahn, outside Berlin
6-15 July 1938  Conference on Jewish refugees held in Evian-les-Bains, France
17 August 1938  All people in Germany whom the Nazis defined as Jews were required to carry identity cards marked with the letter “J” for Jew (Jude)
9 November 1938  “Kristallnacht” — widespread violence in Germany against the Jews
15 November 1938  Jewish children expelled from German schools
1 September 1939  Germany invaded Poland, beginning the Second World War
October 1939  Hitler authorized murder of people with physical and mental disabilities living in institutions in Germany
20 May 1940  Auschwitz I camp opened (in German-occupied Poland)
22 June 1941  SS and German police-manned killing squads invaded the former Soviet Union
15 September 1941  Yellow badge identifying Jews introduced in Germany
29-30 September 1941  Tens of thousands of Jews killed at Babi Yar outside Kiev, Ukraine
8 October 1941  Auschwitz II (Birkenau) camp opened (in German-occupied Poland)
15 October 1941  Systematic deportation of Jews from “Greater Germany” began
20 January 1942  German police authorities ordered mass roundup and deportation of Roma and Sinti
16 December 1942  Warsaw Ghetto uprising began
2 August 1944  Murder of nearly 3,000 prisoners of the “Gypsy family camp” at Auschwitz-Birkenau
7 October 1944  Jewish inmates blow up crematorium IV at Auschwitz-Birkenau
19 April 1943  Nazi Germany surrendered unconditionally
27 January 1945  Soviets liberated Auschwitz camps
7-9 May 1945  Nazi Germany surrendered unconditionally
24 October 1945  United Nations Charter comes into force
20 November 1945  Nuremberg Trials of Nazi war criminals began
10 December 1948  United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
1 July 2002  Rome Statute entered into force creating the International Criminal Court
12 July 2004  United Nations Secretary-General appointed the first Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide
1 November 2005  United Nations General Assembly passed the Holocaust remembrance resolution (60/7)
27 January 2006  First International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust
3 May 2006  United Nations Secretary-General appointed an Advisory Committee on Genocide Prevention
26 January 2007  United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution condemning Holocaust denial (61/255)
21 February 2008  United Nations Secretary-General appointed a Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P)